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SUBJECT: UKRAINE: VATICAN OPTIMISTIC, DEFENDS CARDINAL'S ACTIVISM

REF: A. KIEV 325

[B](#). 04 VATICAN 1171

Summary

[1](#)1. (SBU) Holy See Country Director for Ukraine Monsignor Julio Murat defended Ukrainian (Greek Catholic) Cardinal Lubomyr Husar, insisting that he had "no choice" but to speak out against abuses during his country's recent election controversy. According to Murat, Husar's public statements were not attempts to influence the balloting, but rather to address irregularities that threatened the freedom of the Ukrainian people. Murat was optimistic about Ukraine's future and President Yushchenko, noting that he had seen "encouraging signs" from the new president. Murat admitted that one could still "sense" the extent of Ukraine's East-West divide, but he was hopeful that it would not widen as a result of recent events. All indications are that the Vatican will continue to keep the prospect of upgrading the Ukrainian Catholic jurisdiction into a Patriarchate on the back burner for the time being to avoid adding strains to the delicate religious balance. End Summary.

Husar: No Choice but to Speak Out

[1](#)2. (SBU) Holy See Country Director for Ukraine Monsignor Julio Murat defended the conduct of Ukrainian (Greek Catholic) Cardinal Lubomyr Husar during his country's recent election controversy in a January 21 meeting. "He had no choice but to speak out" against election abuses, Murat insisted. According to Murat, Husar's public statements regarding the disputed vote were not attempts to influence the balloting, but were meant to address irregularities that threatened the freedom of the Ukrainian people. Murat said that, as a religious leader, Husar had a duty to try to protect the human person and the right of the people to political freedom and freedom of speech. Husar was also intent on trying to prevent violence, Murat added.

Encouraging Signs

[1](#)3. (SBU) Murat was optimistic about Ukraine's future and President Yushchenko's government. Murat welcomed what he termed "encouraging signs" from Yushchenko, such as an attempt to make balanced public statements and the wise choice to make his first trip abroad to Russia. He will do his best to "find the right balance" between East and West, Murat said. (Note: Our meeting with Murat took place before news of Yushchenko's naming of Yulia Tymoshenko as Prime Minister (ref a). End note.) Murat said he thought Husar and other Catholic leaders should reach out to the new government discreetly and do what they could to help further the development of civil society. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovic, Papal Nuncio to Ukraine, expressed similar optimism in an interview with Radio Vatican broadcast January 24. Jurkovic called the "honest election" a "great national victory" for Ukraine, adding that he hoped the country would be "reborn" with a "new dignity."

East-West Divide Not Insurmountable

[1](#)4. (SBU) When asked about the East-West divide within Ukraine, Murat was hopeful that it would not widen as a result of recent events. "Certainly one senses (the divide) more at this time," he admitted, and pointed to the various economic and ethnic factors at play, in addition to the religious ones. But Murat felt that progress by Yushchenko on issues of concern to both East and West would go far to overcome current divisions. He noted helpful statements made by Ukrainian Orthodox Patriarch Filaret of Kiev during the imbroglio, and implied that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church could play an important role as the country seeks to heal

lingering wounds from the election.

Ukrainian Patriarchate Still Seems Unlikely in Near Term

15. (SBU) Unlike others we have spoken to about the often-discussed prospect of upgrading the Ukrainian Greek Catholic jurisdiction to the status of a Patriarchate, Murat downplayed the role political (rather than spiritual)

sentiments may be playing in the motivation of proponents. "(Ukrainian Greek Catholics) simply want their church to experience a complete ecclesiastical identity," he insisted. The election controversy seems not to have changed the Vatican's thinking on the issue: it prefers to go slowly and not upset the delicate balance of ecumenical relations with the Russian Orthodox (ref b).

16. (SBU) Despite this orientation, the planned transfer of the seat of the Greek Catholic Church from Lviv to Kiev presents another potential challenge down the road. Although Murat minimized the significance of the move, Vatican-based media have reported on Russian Orthodox sensitivities to perceived "expansion" by the Catholics. We defer to Embassy Kiev on the ultimate significance of such a transfer, however, we suspect that a change in the ecclesiastical status of Kiev and Lviv would eventually lead to Kiev becoming a Patriarchal See.

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